



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

DEC 14 1973

B-114829

The Honorable Robert F. Drinan  
House of Representatives

74-0088



Dear Mr. Drinan:

On March 15, 1973, you informed us that several of your constituents had complained about the service of the Government Printing Office (GPO) in handling orders for publications, and you asked us to investigate this operation. The information we obtained on the matter is summarized below.

The Public Documents Department, under the Superintendent of Documents who is also an Assistant Public Printer, is responsible for selling Government publications to the public. The Public Documents Department processes mail orders at the central office in Washington, D.C., and at distribution centers in Pueblo, Colorado, and Philadelphia. The two distribution centers process orders for those publications which appear on the GPO Selected List--a list of publications most popular with the general public. The central office offers about 25,000 publications as compared to approximately 1,600 basic publications the distribution centers offer.

The Superintendent of Documents stated in recent appropriation hearings that the Public Documents Department receives 10,000 to 40,000 orders daily, resulting in millions of annual mailings, and about 2,000 written complaints daily. GPO records show that about 39 percent of these complaints concern nonreceipt of ordered publications. The number of complaints repeated totals about 8 percent.

Although GPO maintains no overall statistics on the number of days required to process orders, it does make periodic tests to determine how long it takes to fill orders. Tests at the central office during the first quarter of fiscal year 1973 showed that it took 39 days to fill an average order, while third-quarter tests showed an average of 26 days.

In May and June 1973 we conducted our own tests to determine how long it took to fill an order at the central

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office. We randomly selected 510 orders which were packaged and ready for mailing. These tests showed that, on the average, it took 30 days to fill an order.

We made additional tests in September 1973 at the two distribution centers and the central office. We randomly selected orders which were ready for mailing during the same 1-week period. These tests showed that the central office filled orders in about 27 days, while Pueblo and Philadelphia required approximately 5 and 15 days, respectively.

At recent appropriation hearings, the acting Superintendent of Documents at that time stated that:


"\* \* \* we have not been able to provide the service to all purchasers of Government publications that they have every right to expect and receive."

He said that some of the reasons for long delays include the plant's layout, the location of warehouses, and requested publications being out of print.

The Public Printer has stated that improving the service of the Public Documents Department has the highest priority. On May 24, 1973, he established a task force to design and implement improved systems. It includes all aspects of the Public Documents Department operations and should be completed by March 1974.

We trust that this information responds to your immediate needs.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "A. J. Keller". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "A" and a cursive "J".

Comptroller General  
of the United States